



**WRITE  
FOR  
RIGHTS**

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**METU PRIDE DEFENDERS, TURKEY**

**PROSECUTED  
FOR CELEBRATING  
LGBTI RIGHTS**

# METU PRIDE DEFENDERS, TURKEY

From day one, biology students Melike Balkan and Özgür Gür dedicated themselves to defending lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) rights at their university.

As prominent members of the LGBTI+ Solidarity Group at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, they've organized numerous marches, meetings and other events. They've engaged with an ever-growing number of students, against a backdrop of increasing homophobia and restrictions on freedom of expression in Turkey.

Founded in 1996, METU LGBTI+ Solidarity Group have organised an annual Pride march on campus since 2011. Over the years, Pride on METU campus grew in size and visibility. However, in 2019, the university's management told the students the Pride march planned for 10 May could not go ahead on campus.



Undeterred, the Solidarity Group staged a Pride sit-in instead. In response, the university called the police who used excessive force, including tear gas, against the peaceful protestors. Police arrested at least 23 students – including Melike and Özgür – and an academic. Some of those detained hadn't even taken part in the protest. Despite simply exercising their right to peaceful protest, 18 students and the academic are on trial.

If found guilty, they face up to three years in prison.

**Tell Turkey they must be acquitted of all charges.**

## WRITE TO TURKEY'S MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Remind him that the students and the academic were exercising their right to peaceful assembly and should therefore be acquitted of all charges against them.

**Mr Abdülhamit Gül**

Minister of Justice

Adalet Bakanlığı

06659 Ankara,

Turkey

**Twitter:** @abdulhamitgul

**Email:** info@adalet.gov.tr

**Salutation:** Dear Minister of Justice

## SHARE YOUR PRIDE IN MELIKE & ÖZGÜR

Visit METU LGBTI+ Solidarity Group's Twitter & Instagram feed @odtulgbti. Take a photo of yourself with a Pride flag and share on your social media channels, tagging @odtulgbti, and adding a message of support in the caption.

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